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Alcoholism & Traumatic Stress

By Amie Comeau, eHow Contributor

Traumatic stress and alcoholism were until recently treated separately, sometimes by several different doctors. Post-traumatic stress disorder is now treated in addition to an alcohol-abuse problem. Co-occurring disorders of substance abuse and post-traumatic stress show the link of emotional pain and self-medication.

Alcoholism

Drug-treatment centers have more people seeking help for alcohol addiction than any other drug. Many support groups help people in recovery maintain their sobriety. These programs may not be as successful for someone also diagnosed with PTSD.

PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be associated with any violence experienced in the past, such as rape, war or natural disasters. These events manifest currently for the victim and are psychologically debilitating. A person may relive the event long after it has ended and avoid situations that trigger those memories, becoming numb, anxious or depressed.

Twelve-Step Programs

Twelve-step programs may encourage clients with both PTSD and alcoholism to "move on" from their pasts. Many people with PTSD experience relapse while trying to become sober, without addressing the traumas of their pasts.

Co-Occurring Disorders

Persons with co-occurring disorders of PTSD and alcoholism have interpersonal issues that include how to trust others, confusion about relationship expectations and avoiding re-enactments of abusive power. Substance abuse is often enabled within their relationships.

Drug Treatment

Anti-depressants, or SSRI's, have been used with group or family therapy in PTSD treatment. Some therapists are using prescribed medications to assist with alcohol recovery in patients with a dual diagnosis. Medicine, such as Antabuse, when used properly inhibit the urge to self-medicate with alcohol.

Combined Treatments

Therapies such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) support treating both conditions together, rather than addressing each disorder through different, although similar therapies. Programs such as "Seeking Safety" and EEG biofeedback provide clinicians with tools for treating clients with both PTSD and alcoholism.

Resources

- [Finding a Therapist](#)
- [Treatment Research](#)